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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001652

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR G/TIP (BRITTANY BROWN), INL (ANDREW BUHLER)

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: NETWORKING HELPS SHELTER ASSIST TIP VICTIMS

REF: TASHKENT 1512

Classified by: POLOFF TIM BUCKLEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

11. (U) Summary: On September 10, Poloff visited the only shelter in Tashkent for victims of human trafficking. The "Reintegration Center" is funded by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which operates in Uzbekistan through the organization "Istiqbolli Avlod" due to registration issues. Since its opening in 2004, the shelter has assisted more than 200 female TIP victims, a significant accomplishment given the challenges of operating in Uzbekistan. Although the shelter receives no governmental support, staff report that it has become easier to operate effectively and that the GOU seems to be paying more attention to the issue. This is largely a result of success in developing personal connections with local authorities. IOM and shelter staff credit USAID funding to IOM for the shelter and effective USAID and INL-funded police awareness-building programs. End Summary.

SHELTER OVERVIEW: REBUILDING TRUST

12. (U) The shelter for TIP victims opened in Tashkent in 2004 as the first of its kind in Uzbekistan (another smaller shelter has since opened in Bukhara). It serves only female clientele, the vast majority of whom were trafficked and sexually exploited overseas. Thus far, the shelter has assisted more than 200 victims by providing lodging, medical care, psychological treatment, and skills training. The shelter has nine staff, including a doctor, nurse, psychologists, and social workers. Clients typically stay approximately two months, with the first month focused on medical intervention and the second on skills training and reintegration. The shelter has capacity for up to 12 women. During Poloff's visit the census was six, one of whom had a one-month old infant who is also cared for at the shelter. The shelter is located in a traditional Uzbek courtyard home with a fruitful garden, and a flexible community space includes four modern computers which support instructional activities. Staff proudly shared success stories, including an emphatic thank you note from a TIP victim who declared, "I can now trust people again". The shelter is often able to place victims in local vocational programs after their stay.

CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATION

13. (C) Shelter staff follow up on TIP victims after they return to their homes, and work with eight local partner NGOs throughout Uzbekistan. In order to reintegrate, the women generally do not even tell their families that they worked overseas in the sex industry and instead say they went to

Russia for work. This increases the complexity of successfully reintegrating into society. Shelter staff report that many women do choose to return to their hometowns and their families, but others decide to look for opportunities in Tashkent. In some instances, despite the efforts of IOM and shelter staff, they end up working as prostitutes. Two of the women presently at the shelter grew up as orphans and have few places to turn.

"IT IS A LONG AND HARD ROAD..."

14. (C) The shelter relies on IOM funding (which is supported by USAID) and receives no support from the national or local government. The local government has informed IOM that the shelter "is not a priority" for scarce funding. Regarding the GOU's prior claim that it has assisted TIP victims (Reftel Tashkent 1512), it is possible that direct support was provided to TIP victims instead of to the shelter. In the past it has also been difficult for the shelter staff to access TIP victims who are repatriated to Uzbekistan, as airport pickups require coordination with officials from Customs, Immigration, National Security Service, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, each of which have created problems in the past.

"...BUT PERSONAL CONNECTIONS IMPROVED THE SITUATION"

15. (C) IOM and shelter staff noted that their operating climate has gradually improved, particularly because they have made concerted efforts to develop personal connections with airport officials and members of the local government, which helps them cut red tape to better assist victims.

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Furthermore, they report that Uzbek diplomatic missions abroad are generally cooperative in helping TIP victims obtain travel documents to return to Uzbekistan (although financial assistance for repatriation is provided by IOM programs). Ms. Nodira Karimova of IOM believes the government is increasingly aware that "they need to help their citizens". After the shelter opened (but not in 2007), there were sporadic cases of harassment by local police seeking extortion payments (in the belief the shelter had deep-pockets from foreign sponsors), but calls to high-ranking municipal authorities quickly ended the problem. Ms. Karimova said that Tashkent city officials assured her they know about the shelter and invited them to call if they had problems. Ms. Karimova said compared to earlier experiences with the government, "it is like getting a green light". She also added that USAID and INL-funded seminars have substantially improved awareness among police, which has helped tremendously.

COMMENT

16. (C) The accomplishments of the TIP shelter in just three years are significant, particularly given the difficulties of establishing and developing an organization in Uzbekistan. The persistent efforts by IOM and shelter staff to network with various government officials has clearly resulted in improved access to assistance for TIP victims upon their return to Uzbekistan. Indications that the government may be paying more attention to the serious TIP issue are also encouraging, and Poloff was told that traffickers increasingly prefer to route women through alternative regional airports such as Osh (Kyrgyzstan) or Chirchik (Kazakhstan) with false passports because authorities are tougher at the Tashkent Airport. However, IOM still has not been able to officially register in the country despite ongoing efforts. Nonetheless, in spite of IOM's lack of official registration, it has been able to operate several years in Uzbekistan, with many Uzbek officials turning a blind eye. In addition, a local partner NGO in Nukus has not

yet been able to obtain official registration, which limits the effectiveness of IOM's nationwide partnership.

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